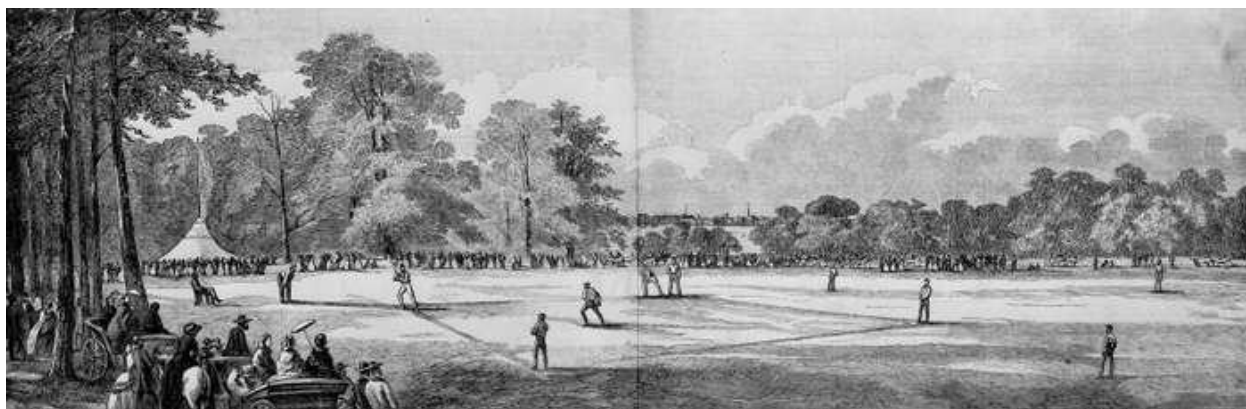




Baseball Origins Newsletter

Volume Six, Number 3

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The baseball origins newsletter is put out by members of SABR's Origins Committee, and the website for baseball's origins, www.protoball.org. It is intended to foster research and discussion of the origins of the game of baseball, baseball's predecessor bat-ball games, and the growth of baseball prior to 1871 (when professional, league baseball was founded).

Comments, suggestions and articles should be submitted to Bruce Allardice, editor, at bsa1861@att.net.

A Rediscovery Generations in the Making

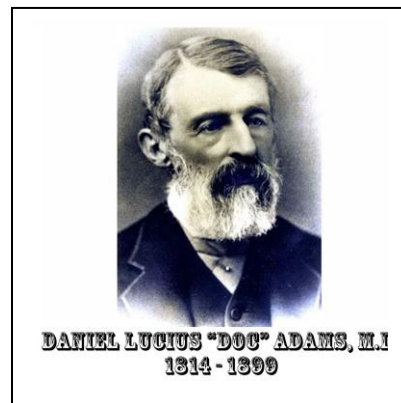
By Roger J. Ratzenberger, Jr.

Many artifacts from baseball's earliest days have been lost to time. Those that survive often find their way into private collections, whether through public auctions or, on occasion, through more nefarious means. For example, several rare baseball-related items have been stolen from the New York Public Library's A.G. Spalding Baseball Collection over the years.

Sometime between fifty-six and eighty-five years ago, a proclamation presented to a baseball pioneer by a pioneering base ball club vanished from the Yale Library. The document was a beautifully crafted work of art, created by one of the most accomplished penmen of his era. With its whereabouts unknown and Yale having no record of it, it came to be feared lost, stolen, or perhaps, worse, destroyed

Overlooked 19th Century Baseball Legend

Daniel Lucius 'Doc' Adams (1814–1899) was not a peripheral figure in baseball's early development, he is arguably "baseball's most important figure not in the Hall of Fame." [1] Adams was one of the most consequential actors in the game's transition from a loosely organized recreational pastime into a more coherent, structured, and enduring sport. He is also widely credited with the creation of the shortstop position.



Doc Adams was a player, club leader, rules advocate, organizer, and one of baseball's most important early structural innovators. The Hall of Fame's own website describes Adams as one of the figures who "helped shape baseball's earliest days" and noted that "a few decades later, this figure

from the game's nascent years would be called by many the 'Father of Baseball' due to his important contributions in turning the sport into the National Pastime." [2]

Adams arrived in New York in 1839, set-up his medical practice and began playing base ball, although it is known he was playing some form of "bat and ball" game as early as 1832. [3] After a brief stint playing with the New York Base Ball Club, he joined the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club in 1845, about a month after the organization of the club. [4]

In May of 1846, his first full year with the Knickerbockers, Doc was elected Vice-President of the club and would, over his sixteen years of membership, go on to serve six terms as President ('47, '48, '49, '56, '57 and '61) and several terms as a Director.

The first five years of the Knickerbocker's existence were the hardest. According to Doc's youngest child, Roger Cook Adams, in his memoir on his father written in 1939:

"Fortunately, he was a convincing speaker, and the many dinners that were held gave him his chance to keep up the enthusiasm in the early and difficult days. The term 'pep talk' would have meant nothing to him, but that undoubtedly was what the boys got." [5]

Roger Adams's memoir of his father chronicles Doc Adams' many contributions to baseball and is especially noteworthy for the way it highlights his father's deep passion for the game, a passion that proved invaluable to baseball's early development.

Adams' love of the game led him to persevere, once saying, "As captain, I had to employ all my rhetoric to induce attendance." Those happy hours spent at the "Elysian Fields" fueled his dedication. [4]

When obtaining playing equipment became an early challenge, Doc Adams stepped forward and took responsibility for producing the baseballs used by the Knickerbockers. As new clubs were organized, he supplied balls for them as well, helping to support the game's rapid growth. He also oversaw the crafting of bats, ensuring they were properly made and conformed to

the emerging standards of the game. When the Knickerbockers revised the by-laws and rules of the club in 1848 and 1854, Adams headed the committees.

At the end of 1856, at a special Knickerbocker meeting, the club resolved to call for a convention for the purpose of standardizing rules and play. Again, by resolution, Doc and two other teammates were appointed to form a committee and call for a convention in which sixteen teams participated.

This convention was held in January and March of 1857 and Doc was elected president. Some of the significant resolutions passed at this convention were nine players per side, nine innings, ninety-foot basepaths, and the prohibition of gambling.

“In March of the next year the second convention was held [at the request of the Empire Club] and at this meeting the annual convention was declared a permanent organization, and with the requisite constitution and by-laws became the National Association of Base Ball Players [N.A.B.B.P.].” [4]

Adams served as Chairman of the N.A.B.B.P. Rules and Regulations Committee from that point until he retired from the game.

Retirement From the Game

On March 26, 1862, at the annual meeting of the Knickerbockers, Doc presented a letter to the club secretary, James Whyte Davis:

“I shall not be able to attend the meeting of the Club this evening and furthermore feel compelled to tender my resignation of membership. I do this with great reluctance but in accordance with a determination long since formed, never to remain an inactive non-playing member. It will be impossible for me to play during the coming season, but although absent in body, I shall be present in spirit. My interest in the Club will never cease, nor can I forget the many happy hours spent in communion with its members.” [6]

And so, Doc’s active participation in the game he loved, and over which he had a significant and pioneering influence, came to a close.

In accepting Doc's resignation, James Whyte Davis wrote that he had been "unanimously elected an Honorary Member" and "I indulge the hope that the 'spirit' you express of being with us always, may be accompanied by the body on the old Play Grounds."

He closed the letter with the postscript, "Playing commences on the 21st", as if to say, if you change your mind, please join us. [7]

The Nestor of Ball Players

Nestor: A prominent secondary character in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, where he appears as an elderly warrior who frequently offers advice to the other characters. The word is used to describe a wise old man, a patriarch, or the senior, most experienced leader in a particular field.

Upon his retirement, a committee of Henry A. Thomas, Louis J. Belloni, and W. H. Tucker was appointed to draft resolutions "expressive of their feelings".

A proclamation incorporating the resolutions, known as the "Nestor of Ball Players", was prepared by Benjamin Franklin Brady. Described as "a most gorgeously engrossed" document, it was presented to Adams, together with a letter from the committee, in recognition of his "long and meritorious service to the club." [8]

"Please accept from the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club the accompanying set of Resolutions expressive of the feelings of the Club towards their old officer and associate.

We are gratified at being the means of transmitting to you the Expressions of feeling from the Knickerbockers and it is with no ordinary pleasure we subscribe ourselves." [8]

The resolutions were an acknowledgement of the leadership role that he played not only with the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club but with the National Association of Base Ball Players.

"Nestor of Ball Players" Proclamation

“The Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of the City of New York desirous of placing on record their high appreciation of their late associate and fellow member, Dr. D. L. Adams; and their sincere regret at his retirement from the club, did at the annual meeting held March 26th, 1862, appoint a committee to draft resolutions expressive of their feelings, and upon the report of said committee the following were unanimously adopted:

“Resolved, that by the resignation of Dr. D. L. Adams, the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club has lost one of its most honored members: one who for a period of sixteen years in the performance of every duty whether at the bat or in the field, as our presiding officer, or represented in the National Association of Ball Players, or in the daily walks of life, has ever been faithful and uniformly proved himself the courteous high-minded gentleman, and the zealous advocate of our noble game.

“The Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of the City of New York desirous of placing on record their high appreciation of their late associate and fellow member, Dr. D. L. Adams; and their sincere regret at his retirement from the club, did at the annual meeting held March 26th, 1862, appoint a committee to draft resolutions expressive of their feelings, and upon the report of said committee the following were unanimously adopted:

“Resolved, that to him as much if not more than any other individual member are the Knickerbockers indebted for the high rank their club has maintained since its organization, and we claim for him the honored title of “Nestor of Ball Players.”

“Resolved, that with unfeigned regret we yield to the imperative necessity that compels his withdrawal from the roll of our active members, and beg to assure him that in leaving us he carries with him our heartfelt wishes for his welfare, happiness and prosperity, and We cherish the hope often to be the recipients of the benefit of his good counsel and long experience.”

James Whyte Davis, Secretary W. P. Bensel, President
Henry A. Thomas
Louis J. Belloni Committee
W. H. Tucker [9]

Benjamin Franklin Brady

Benjamin Franklin Brady was a well-known artist in New York City. He was recognized as an expert penman, someone highly skilled in the art of penmanship and calligraphy. [10]

“His ability was soon recognized as he had more orders for engrossing than he could readily fill.” [11]

Counted among the most accomplished penmen of his day, he left behind a remarkable body of work. Specimens of his craftsmanship adorned public buildings throughout the region, while countless others, such as Doc Adams’ “Nestor of Base Ball” proclamation, were treasured by private families. [12]

“Benjamin F. Brady... styled himself an artist penman.

His work has been famous here in New York, for many years and during his life he probably engrossed more official documents, memorials, albums and society resolutions than any other man in that line of business.” [10]

What Happened to the Proclamation?

The proclamation became a cherished family heirloom and Cornelia said in a letter that it was hung "as large as life in the dining room."

Roger’s son, Daniel Putnam Adams, along with his wife Adelaide, recorded an interview of his father in January 1962. Roger recounted some of his recollections of what he learned about the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club from his father. He also recalled donating some of his father’s baseball artifacts to the Yale Library.

"...that that was Nestor of ball players. That was a set of resolutions passed by the club when he left it. It was a very flowery resolution... I deposited that, together with the original rule books that I had and a few letters and one thing or another with the Yale library, they have them there." [13]

The Mystery of the Missing Proclamation

Doc Adams' great granddaughter, Marjorie Adams, said that for years the family has been trying to get Yale to locate the proclamation. "My grandfather donated the proclamation to Yale sometime in the 1950s and much later, sometime in the 1960s or 1970s, my father wanted to have the proclamation professionally photographed. But Yale could not locate it. We've been searching for it ever since." [14]

The disappearance traces back to at least August 1970, when Daniel Putnam Adams, Marjorie's father, sought to acquire copies of the documents. Evidence of his effort survives in copy of a letter he sent to the Yale University Library requesting reproductions. [15]

As Marjorie related, the proclamation was unable to be located at that time.

She had success in obtaining the letter James Whyte Davis sent to Doc upon his retirement, the famous "Topsy" letter from Henry Chadwick, and the Knickerbocker letter that accompanied the Nestor proclamation. It's not clear that she ever saw the letters her great-great-grandfather wrote to his son. One thing is certain: she had no success in locating the "Nestor of Ball Players" proclamation itself.

In 2011, a formal request was submitted to Yale seeking access to the proclamation. The response from a Yale archivist was discouraging: "Unfortunately, I have not found any reference to the proclamation that was presented to Daniel L. Adams upon his retirement from baseball in 1862."

Yale still held the letter that had accompanied the proclamation, but the proclamation itself was missing from the collection and there was no record of it.

The library's Head of Collection Development was subsequently contacted to inquire about what efforts were being made to locate the missing document and whether official accession records from the original Adams donation still existed. His brief response was that he was "unable to comment."

A Serendipitous Coincidence

Fast forward to May 2026. Hayden Trubitt, the current owner of the "Laws of Base Ball" documents, arranged for their long-term display at the National Baseball Hall of Fame. The Hall incorporated the documents into its "Taking the Field" exhibit and scheduled the debut to coincide with the opening of its Military Classic Weekend, part of the institution's Memorial Day observance and America 250 commemoration.

The week before Memorial Day, Nate Adams Downey, Doc Adams' great-great-grandson, visited Connecticut before traveling to Cooperstown, where he would attend the debut of his ancestor's historic "Laws of Base Ball." Along the way, he visited a number of significant sites in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut associated with Doc Adams' life, career, and enduring legacy.

While in Connecticut, I gave Nate a tour of New Haven, including the burial sites of Doc and his wife, Cornelia, as well as the two homes where they once resided. We also visited Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Although we did not have time to conduct any research during the visit, the stop ultimately proved worthwhile.

While speaking with a member of the library's security staff, we learned that the library had recently updated and digitized its catalog. After returning from Cooperstown, I conducted a search and was rewarded with three promising hits:

Adams, Daniel 14 ALS [Autographed, Letter, Signed] to his son, Daniel
Lucius Adams
Adams, Daniel Lucius 1833-1898
Adams, Daniel Lucius 1862

The third listing particularly piqued my interest, though I tried not to get my hopes up (even though the folder was called "Miscellaneous Manuscripts: Oversize").

I requested a hold on the three items (two were in offsite storage) and a few days later I was enroute to the Yale's Sterling Memorial Library to review the papers.

After receiving a brief tutorial on how to handle the documents, the staff brought me the first box. I was immediately disappointed when I opened it. I pulled out the specified folder and found it contained a solitary note stating "Transferred to Miscellaneous MSS A, Ms. Grp. 352, 8/85". The staff, however, couldn't decipher the note and identify where the contents had been moved. So, I abandoned that box and exchanged it for the second one.

To our surprise, the letters from Daniel Adams to his son had actually been transferred to this second box. The folder in that box contained fourteen original letters along with typed transcriptions. It also included the letter James Whyte Davis sent to Doc upon his retirement, as well as the famous "Topsy" letter Henry Chadwick wrote to Doc.

"Base [ball], like Topsy, 'never had no fader'; it growed up." [16]

The final item in the folder was the letter that accompanied the "Nestor of Ball Players" proclamation from the Knickerbocker committee that drafted the resolutions: Henry A. Thomas, Louis J. Belloni, and William H. Tucker.

New York April 4 1862
 D. L. Adams Esq
 D. L.

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your note of 26 ult tendering your resignation as a member of the old Knickerbocker B. B. Club, and that it was reluctantly accepted with great regret and you was unanimously elected an Honorary Member.

Permit me to add my personal regret of the necessity that induced such a course and tendering you my best wishes for your health and prosperity, & indulge the hope that the spirit you express of being with us always, may be accompanied by the body on the old Play Grounds.

Yours very truly
 J. M. Whyte Davis
 Secretary.

Playing commences on the 27th.

Figure 1 Letter From James Whyte Davis Acknowledging Adams' Retirement, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University

Harlem April 16th 1862
 D. L. Adams Esq
 D. L.

Dear Sir: I have access from the Knickerbocker B. B. Club the accompanying of a resolution expressing the interest of the Club towards your old office and attitude.

We are gratified at being the means of transmitting to you the expression of feeling from the Knickerbocker B. B. Club and we will be ordering Station in advance of the Club.

Very truly yours
 Henry A. Brown }
 Geo. J. Bellows } Committee
 H. H. Tucker }

Figure 2 Letter From The Knickerbockers Accompanying The "Nestor of Base Ball" Proclamation, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University

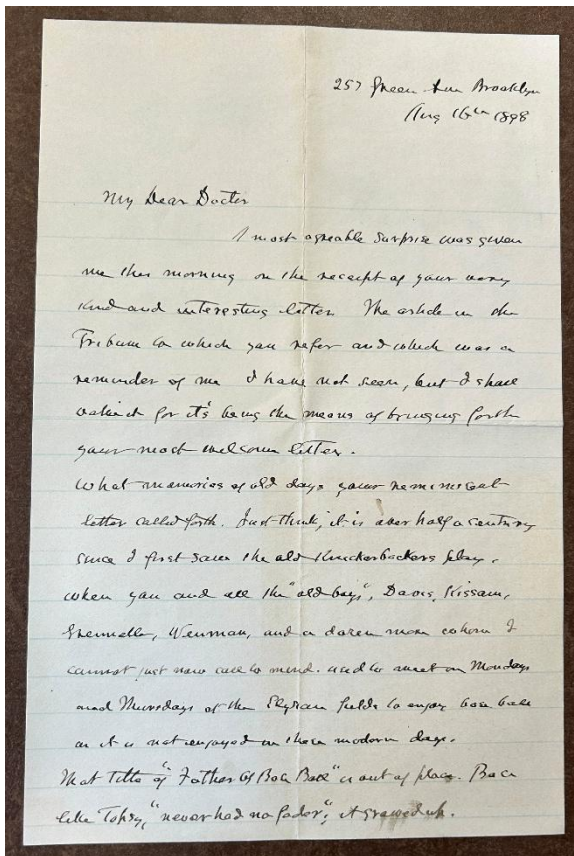


Figure 3 Henry Chadwick "Topsy" Letter to Doc Adams p. 1, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University

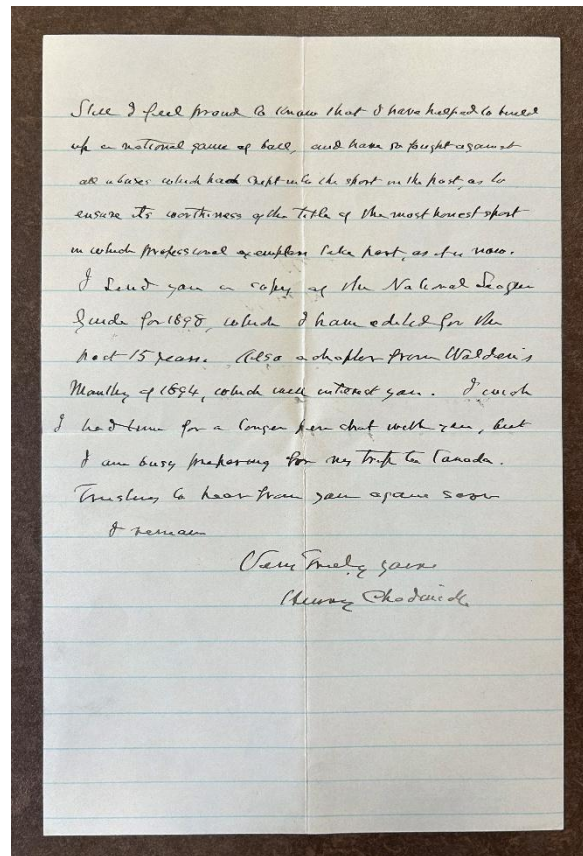


Figure 4 Henry Chadwick "Topsy" Letter to Doc Adams p. 2, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University

These documents were first discovered by John Thorn in the mid-2000's.

Although Yale had denied ever having received the proclamation, the Knickerbockers' letter rekindled my hopes, even though experience should have taught me better.

Found At Last

When I finished reviewing the contents of the second folder, I exchanged the box for the third item, a large, oversized folder. The proclamation had been missing for at least fifty-six years and numerous efforts to locate it had failed. So while I opened the folder with anticipation, I did so with little real expectation of finding anything.

To my amazement, when I opened the folder I saw the word "Knickerbockers" peeking out between several documents. I realized that I was looking at the top of the "Nestor of Ball Players" proclamation!



Figure 5 Roger Ratzenberger with The "Nestor", Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University

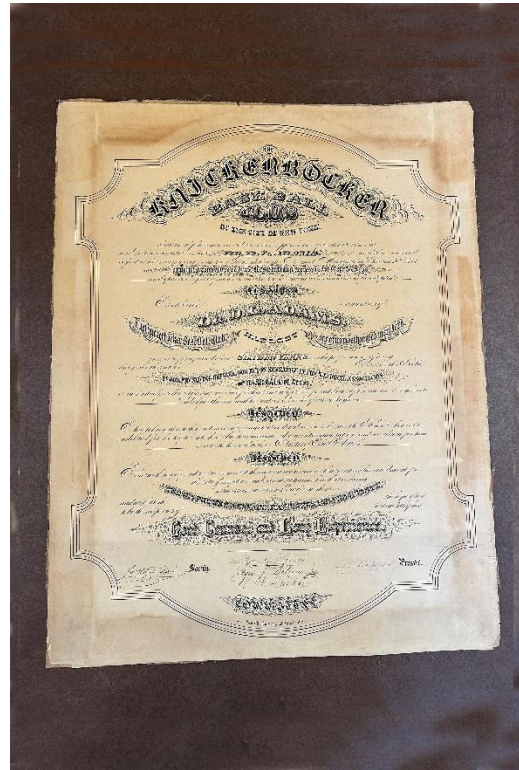


Figure 6 The Nestor Of Ball Players Proclamation, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

I sat there for a while, absorbing the moment. It was hard to believe that this 164-year-old document was finally in front of me. I had known its story for more than fifteen years and understood that it had been sought unsuccessfully for at least fifty-six years. Holding it in my hands, I appreciated the significance of what had survived, even if neither the document nor the man it celebrated is widely known or properly acknowledged today.

I couldn't wait to share news of the find with Nate, so I immediately texted him a photo with no description. Needless to say, he was very excited and looks forward to seeing it in person the next time he visits the area.

I'm just sorry Marjorie Adams and Nancy Adams Downey never got to see it.

Completing The ‘Roger C. Adams’ Collection

Upon returning home, I relistened to Roger C. Adams' interview and was reminded that he mentioned that he donated “the original rule books that I had” to Yale as well [13]. Armed with that information, I conducted a follow-up search, which produced the following:

By-Laws and Rules of the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club: Organized
September 23, 1845 (April 1848)

- By-Laws and Rules of the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club: Organized
September 23, 1845 (April 1854)
- By-Laws and Rules of the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club: Organized
September 23, 1845 (April 1857)

Examining these pamphlets, which hadn't been missing, was a bit anti-climactic after finding the proclamation, but it was exciting, nonetheless.

Each of the volumes is inscribed with “41- Roger C. Adams” which may indicate the year they were donated to the library, 1941.

The 1848 document had a handwritten list of 26 members of the team on the inner cover.

Even better, Doc Adams signed the front cover of the 1854 document, “D. L. Adams, 14 Bond St.” Interestingly, Daniel L. Adams does not show up at “14 Bond St” in a New York City directory until 1859 (where he is incorrectly identified as a dentist). [17] In the 1860 edition, he is correctly described as a physician. [18]

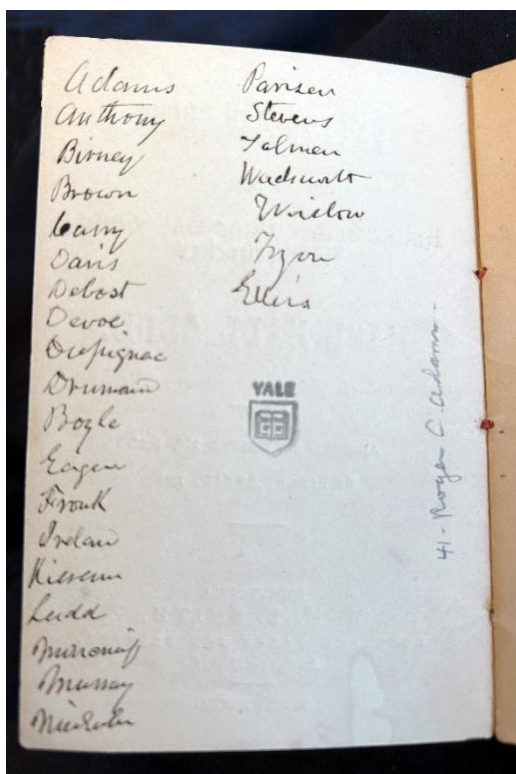


Figure 7 1848 By-Laws and Rules of the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University

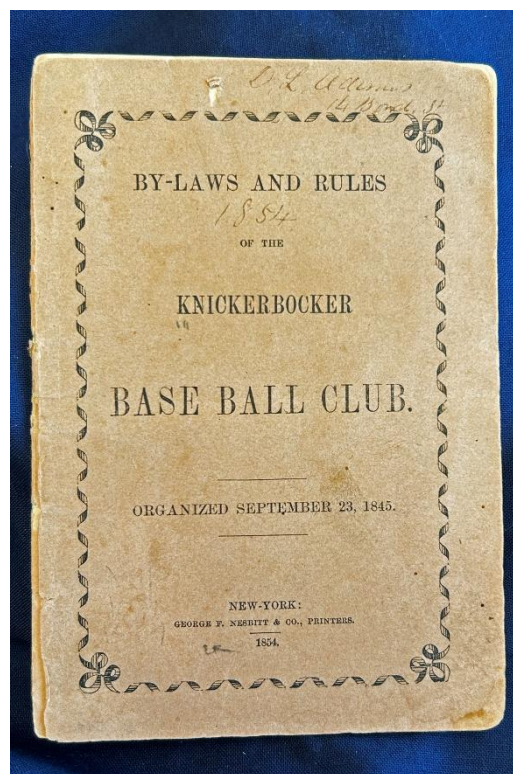


Figure 8 1854 By-Laws and Rules of the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University

Although finding the proclamation was nothing short of magical, holding Doc Adams' personal copies of the Knickerbocker Rules came in a very close second, offering another rare and direct connection to baseball's formative years and one of baseball's earliest pioneers.

There's still work to do to understand how the proclamation went missing for somewhere between fifty-six to eighty-five years and how it fortunately resurfaced. But for the moment, we'll just celebrate its rediscovery.

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[3] N. Adams, "Bat and Ball" Letter from Nancy Adams to Doc Adams, Mont Vernon, NH, 1832.

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[5] R. C. Adams, *Nestor of Ball Players*, unpublished, 1939.

[6] D. L. Adams, Retirement letter to James Whyte Davis, KBBC, New York, NY, 1862.

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[8] H. A. Thomas, L. J. Belloni and W. H. Tucker, Letter to Daniel L. Adams, M.D. accompanying the "Nestor of Ball Players" proclamation, New York, NY, 1863.

[9] Knickerbocker Base Ball Club, "Nestor of Ball Players" proclamation, New York: Benjamin Franklin Brady, 1862.

[10] "An Expert Penman Dead: The Work Which Benjamin F. Brady Raised to an Art," *The New York Times*, p. 8, 2 April 1888.

[11] "Benjamin Franklin Brady," *New York Tribune*, p. 5, 1 April 1888.

[12] "Death of Benjamin F. Brady," *Wildwood's Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 1, May 1888.

[13] R. C. Adams, Interviewee, Roger Cook Adams Interview (by Daniel Putnam and Adelaide Adams). [Interview]. January 1962.

[14] P. J. Nash, "Baseball Pioneer Doc Adams' Knickerbocker Scroll Missing from Yale University Library," 16 September 2011. [Online]. [Accessed 2011].

[15] D. P. Adams, Letter from Daniel Putnam Adams to Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, 1970.

[16] H. Chadwick, Letter from Henry Chadwick to Doc Adams, Brooklyn, NY, 1898.

[17] New York City directory, 1859-1860, New York: John F. Trow, 1859.

[18] New York City directory, 1860-1861, New York: John F. Trow, 1860.

The Blue Chip Prospects of Antebellum New York City, Vol I

John Oliver's five home run game

By: David Rader



**John Oliver
SECOND BASE**

(photo of John Oliver c. 1859, courtesy of *Threads of Our Game*)

When deciding who should be the first prospect written about, I want to jump to the most obvious question: who was the first notable young prospect to be lured away from a “lesser” club into a first-rate senior club’s starting nine? I’ve speculated before that it was John Galvin, but that was incorrect. For my money, I’d wager the real answer is second baseman John Oliver when he jumped from the Continental Club to the Atlantic Club after the NABBP’s inaugural 1857 season.[1]

The Continentals were a member of the NABBP, ostensibly giving them equal standing with the Atlantic Club. Of the two clubs, however, the Atlantics warranted far more coverage in the three big baseball weeklies of the day.[2] This owed to two things. For one, the Continentals never

traveled to take on the big New York City clubs, staying instead in their native Brooklyn for all of their matches.

The second reason, to be blunt, was that they just weren't a very good team. The Continentals went 0-3-1 against the two top Brooklyn clubs of 1857, the Atlantics and Putnams. Their one moral victory was a 34-34 tie in the second leg of their three-match series with the former on October 2. The Atlantics remedied that four days later with a 26-13 drubbing.

That all is to say that despite paying the \$2 fee at the inaugural rules convention to receive the "senior club" moniker, the Continental Club was made up mostly of junior-level talent.

The one obvious exception in their ranks was a young second baseman named John Oliver. The 18-year-old's burst onto the scene a month into the 1857 season when he hit five home run game in a match against the junior Baltic Club on July 7. The performance warranted special correspondence to *Porter's Spirit of the Times*, which they published 11 days later:

"(The author) cannot but make mention of Oliver's playing...his batting was superior to anything we ever saw; he batted his balls swift and low, and made five home runs on the game."

Note the description "swift and low." Fields were not enclosed in 1857; if there was a fence, the dimensions were not built with base ball in mind. Many grounds had rules where balls hit over the outfield fence were less than home runs. In at least one later account, Lipman Pike hit a fly ball that cleared the outfield fence and continued until it also cleared a neighboring house, only to be awarded a single.

Home runs in this era were a product of what we'd now consider to be gap power. Without a nearby fence to stop the ball, a line drive between the outfielders continued to roll along as the striker ran the bases. The best home run swings weren't geared toward fly balls. They strove for daisy cutters with eyes on them.

That is all to say, Oliver did not enjoy five leisurely trots. These were full-blown wind sprints as the opposing outfielders made an equal effort to close on the live ball and put it back in play to the pitcher.

This may help explain how Oliver's supporting cast seemingly squandered his remarkable effort as the Continentals lost the match, 24-18. When you consider that every home run had to be earned on the bases, the absence of lead runners would certainly simplify things for the striker.

While five home run games are not unprecedented during the NABBP era, it proved to be very rare and special achievement. W.H. Murtha clubbed five homers in a match against the Brooklyn Club (of Brooklyn) on September 21, 1861, in a 46-12 victory. Lipman Pike hit five against a muffin club from Danville, PA in July 1866; Harry Wright's Hall of Fame plaque mentions a seven home run game in Newport, KY from 1867.

Unlike those matches, however, John Oliver's five home runs came in a losing effort against a club of relatively equal standing. Oliver's five home runs also represent a much higher proportion of his team's runs than the other three men listed above in their respective efforts. Pike's Philadelphia Athletics beat Danville 67-25, while Harry Wright's Cincinnati club defeated Newport 93-22.

To add further insult to injury, the Baltic Club of Brooklyn came away with the game ball as their trophy on the day. Oliver couldn't even keep it as a souvenir!

Oliver led off for the Continentals in the aforementioned October 2 tie with the Atlantics. He had a relatively poor game, making four outs against three runs scored, but the Atlantics evidently saw what they needed to see. John Oliver made the jump over to the Atlantics to begin the 1858 season. He played in matches two and three of the Fashion Course series that year. Oliver remained with the Atlantic Club until 1863. Tuberculosis claimed his life in 1869, four days after his thirty-first birthday.

Acknowledgements: The author referenced *Base Ball 19th Century "Winter" Meetings* for information about the NABBP.

[1] Okay, the inaugural NABP season is *technically* 1858. But the 1857 meeting was the NABBP in everything but name, in my opinion.

[2] They being *the New York Clipper*, *the New York Sunday Mercury*, and *Porter's Spirit of the Times*.

Journo Gems...1869

Touring in the Shadows

By Robert Tholkes

Touring—as defined here, playing two or more games in two or more locations on a single trip—was inaugurated in baseball in 1860 by the wealthy amateur Excelsior Club of Brooklyn, which paid its own expenses to play that year in western New York State and Philadelphia, and later in Washington, and Baltimore. Touring resumed after the Civil War and expanded from the east into the modern midwest in 1867 when the National Club of Washington trekked as far as St. Louis, again paying its own expenses. Tours in 1868 took the unofficially professional Athletic of Philadelphia, Atlantic of Brooklyn, and Union of Morrisania (now in the Bronx) on similar tours, also as far as St. Louis. All were contenders for the unofficial national championship awarded by the print (and only) nationally distributed media to the eastern champion. All collected fees or gate receipts for playing, but all failed to meet expenses.

1869 is in baseball history the season of the Cincinnati Base Ball Club, dubbed--first locally and then nationally after to its tour of the sport's eastern heartland--as the Red Stockings. The club had embarked on a 21-game tour, visited Greater New York City and Philadelphia, defeated all the championship contenders, and returned home undefeated and touted as the real national champion, the eastern baseball press notwithstanding.

The Red Stockings were far from being the only tourists of 1869, though its was the most extensive. Other touring clubs' ventures have remained in Cincinnati's shadow, and are long forgotten.

The following visit summary, printed in the Evansville, Ind., *Journal* on July 20, 1869 (pre-centennial of the day when NASA's Apollo 11 reached the goal of its historic 'tour') indicates that even in baseball's bushes tours could cause excitement. The Bluff City Club of distant Memphis, roughly 300 miles downriver on the Ohio, was due. The tourists' boat, the *Robert Burns*, had stopped two weeks before on its way upriver, as the *Journal* had noted on July 7:

"EN ROUTE.- The Bluff City Base Ball Club, from Memphis, passed up yesterday, on the steamer Robert Burns, bound for Cincinnati, to play the (nearby) Covington and Newport Clubs. The Evansvilles invited them to play a game here, but they declined, promising to play on their return."



The *Robert Burns*

The Bluff Citys had a competitively unsuccessful sojourn in the Cincinnati area and ended by primarily playing Cincinnati clubs, according to a 'Cincinnati Base Ball Items' note in the *New York Clipper* weekly sports newspaper on July 31:

“The Bluff City Club, of Memphis, Tenn., had an unfortunate career in Porkopolis, losing every game they played. After being beaten by the Buckeye, Cincinnati and Holt, Juniors, they essayed the Cincinnati Amateur nine, and came out second best, in a score of 60 to 30...”

From that point, Associated Press items, telegraph connections, or perhaps the availability of upriver newspapers could allow the Evansville baseballists to follow the progress downriver of the *Robert Burns* and its Bluff City Club passengers.

The Evansville *Journal* 's report of July 20 opened its coverage with the headline, “**Match Game of Base Ball.** The Bluff City vs. the Crescent City. *THE BLUFF CITY THE VICTORS.*”

Its report recorded a considerable pre-game buzz and detailed the course of the game:

“Expectation was on tip-toe among the lovers of the “national game” yesterday in this city. All the base ballists and their friends were inquiring every five minutes of everybody, who they supposed knew anything about it, and of a good many others, “what time will the *Robert Burns* arrive?” At 3 P. M. her calliope announced her approach, and Water Street, the wharf, and the wharfboats were immediately alive with people. The nine who had been finally picked out to play the match game boarded the boat, and eagerly inquired if they were to have the pleasure of a game. Captain Stein, finding a good deal of freight to take, agreed to give them time to play five innings. Express wagons were in readiness, and the contestants were soon on the field, and a large crowd of spectators assembled to witness the contest.

The weather was rather favorable, being only moderately hot, and the sun partially veiled by light clouds. The Bluff City Club won the choice of umpire and selected a young gentleman named N. B. Hirst, but from what Club we did not learn. The Evansville Club won the bat and opened the game.

The first inning was the most brilliant of the game. Dexter first took the bat and went out on a foul caught by Benton.

Babcock sent a ball towards the sky, and Rapp had his hands fairly under it as it came down.

Wentz generously sent his ball within easy distance of short stop, who passed it to first base in time, and the side went out whitewashed.

Tom Burke, of the Bluff City, handed an easy ball to Roach on second base, who accepted the courtesy, and Burke passed the bat to Winters, who batted to the neighborhood of left base, who stopped it readily, and passed it a moment too late to first base. Winters got his second base on a passed ball.

Swartz sent a long ball beautifully batted to left field, which John Wheeler took handsomely, amid much applause by the spectators, and Winters made his third base.

Benton batted to second base, and Roach accommodated him, putting out the side--whitewashed.

Roach at the bat opened the second inning, and attempted to make first on called balls, but failed to come to time. Nurre sent a ball safe to right field, and got to third base and stole home.

Wheeler was caught out on third strike.

Gwathmey batted his ball too short and failed to reach first base on time.

The Bluff City Club had a series of good luck, and held the bat till they scored thirteen, one-half of the bases at least being made on passed balls and wild throwing. Some very fine batting was done by the Memphis Club, but owed most of their success to passed balls. In this inning John Wheeler took another beautiful fly by Lawrence. Levi sent a nice ball straight to Babcock, who muffed it and let Levi to the third, and he stole home on a passed ball. T. Burke offered another nice, long ball

to Wheeler, who dropped it. In this inning we noticed nine passed balls, all of service to the Bluff City.

From that time on, the playing was more even, and on the last three innings the score was the same, the playing on both sides improving. Throughout the entire game, however, there was a manifest lack of animation on the part of the Evansville Club, and the general remark was that they had never been known to play so badly, even in practice games. The umpire in one or two instances was manifestly mistaken. He put Babcock out on first base, when it was manifest to all on the ground that Babcock had fairly made the base. It is human to err, and we give the umpire credit for honesty of purpose.

The Evansville Club offers as an excuse for their defeat the fact, that three of their best players were sick, and one necessarily absent. One of their nine had not played a game for a year. We are inclined to think, however, that they had over-rated their ability, or had underestimated their antagonists. The game was lost on the second inning. The best spirit was manifested by both parties during the contest, and each expressed a desire to meet again. The Evansville Club regretted that their antagonists were necessarily hurried away, and could not enjoy their hospitality. The Bluff City Club hurried to the boat, and left immediately for home."

EVANSVILLE.		BLUFF CITY.	
	O. R.		O. R.
Dexter, 1 b.....	2 2	T. Burke, 1 b.....	2 3
Babcock, c f.....	2 2	Winters, r f.....	2 2
Wents, s s.....	2 2	Swarts, s s.....	1 4
Roach, 2 b.....	2 1	Benton, c.....	1 4
Nurre, 3 b.....	1 2	W. Burke, 3 b.....	2 3
Wheeler, l f.....	4 0	Lawrence, 2 b.....	2 2
Wwathmey, p...1	2 2	Levi, l f.....	2 3
Coolidge, r 1.....	1 2	Reynolds, p.....	1 4
Boicourt, c.....	0 3	Rapp, c f.....	2 3
	15 16		15 23
Innings.....	1 2 3 4 5	Total.	
Evansville	0 1 3 4 8	16	
Bluff City.....	0 13 3 4 8	23	

The practice of printing bylines being some decades in the future, the reporter cannot by name be congratulated or blamed for the contents. I suspect the editor--whose name is also not printed! Evansville journalists evidently took no chances.

SABR Convention Wrap Up

By Bruce Allardice

The Cleveland SABR Convention attracted over 500 attendees, most staying at the beautiful downtown Hilton Hotel. Its well-frequented open-air bar on the 32nd floor featured a spectacular view of Lake Erie.

Of the many very good presentations at the convention, the highlight (to this observer, at least) was the presentation by Tom Schieber of the Baseball Hall of Fame, on the creating of the 1857 Rules of Baseball. Schieber traced the 3 drafts of these rules, noting their changes from draft to draft, and how one draft almost had us playing a 12, not 9, inning game!



Schieber

More particularly, we had a meeting at the convention of the Origins of Baseball Committee, the first such in recent memory. Committee Chair Bruce Allardice hosted the meeting, which explored possible committee initiatives such as a SABR survey on the greatest game prior to 1876 (see below), and nominating an all-star team of pre-1871 players. Suggestions from attendees were discussed.

SABR national has instituted a new policy designed to regularize SABR Research Committees like ours. This regularization includes having elections for Committee Chair, putting out a newsletter (already done), and having (at a minimum) twice a year committee meetings, either in-person or zoom. We are planning to have a zoom/online committee meeting this October, to comply with these directives.

Save the date! SABR will be heading to Birmingham, Alabama for our 55th annual convention on August 4–8, 2027. Registration information for SABR 55 and our special room block at the Sheraton Birmingham Hotel will be available at [SABR.org/convention](https://sabr.org/convention) in early 2027.

Birmingham is home to [Rickwood Field](#), the oldest professional baseball park in the United States, along with the Negro Southern League Museum and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Tour.

Favorite Game Survey

As you know, as part of baseball's celebration of 150 years of MLB, a SABR member is conducting a survey of SABR members to ask that they respond to the following question: If you could attend any single major league game played since opening day 1876 when the Boston Reds defeated the Philadelphia Athletics, which game would you attend?

I'd like to see the SABR Origins Committee do something similar, for years prior to 1876.

IMO (and that of Bob Tholkes) this would be a perfect complement to the other survey, and gain the Origins Committee some needed attention. I've already asked Jacob Pomrenke for advice on doing an online survey.

Any thoughts on what games should be on the ballot, other than those mentioned below (suggested by Bob Tholkes and others)?

Philadelphia Town Ball Birth, c. 1833
Game in Beachville, Ontario, 1838
the so-called first Knickerbocker game in 1845,
the Fashion Race Course games of 1858,
the first Atlantic-Excelsior match in 1860, when Creighton astounded the baseball fraternity with his pitching,
the Oct. 14, 1862 game in which Jim Creighton died
the Irvington upset of the champion Brooklyn Atlantics, June 14, 1866
Forest City of Rockford's upset of the National of Washington D.C. during the latter club's 1867 tour, the first victory for a 'western' club over a club of eastern players

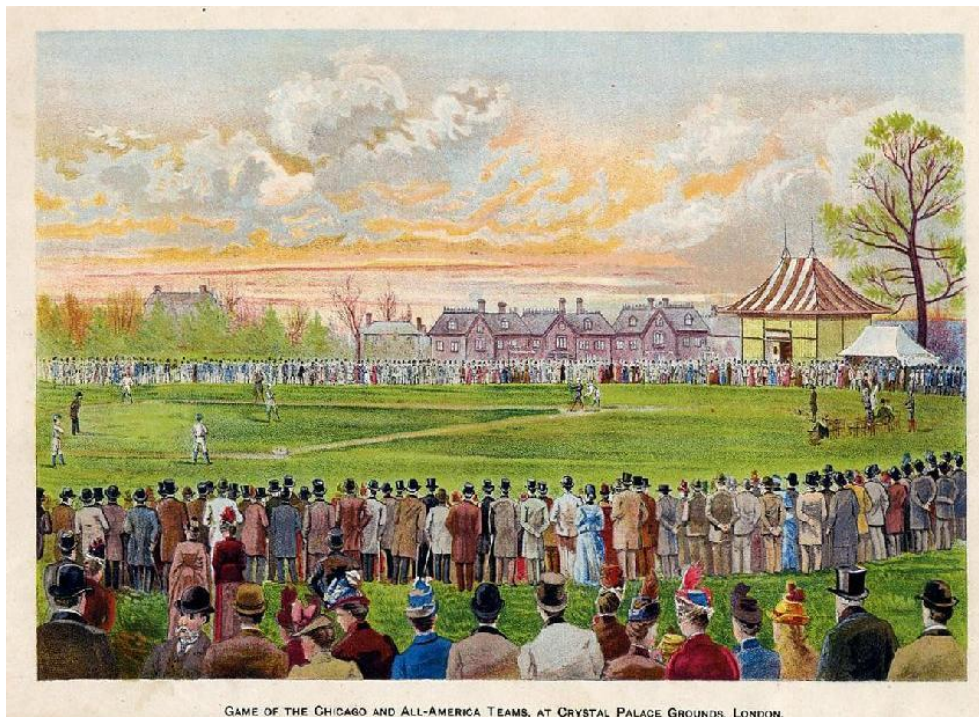
the Mutual-Red Stocking game of 1869, when the low score (4-2) shocked the baseball public,
the first Cincy Red Stockings loss to the Atlantics on June 14, 1870,
the White Sox-Red Stockings decisive game on Oct. 13, 1870,
the first Pro league contest, in Fort Wayne in 1871

Your input would be welcomed. Contact Bsa1865@gmail.com

English Reactions to Baseball

By Bruce Allardice

In the 1800s, our British cousins generally looked down upon the American game of baseball, at least when they were exposed to it. Whether this came from national pride, social disdain for what they saw as uncouth Americans, or a genuine belief that baseball was inferior to traditional English bat-ball games, their opinions are worth noting.



After the 1888 Spalding “world tour,” which included baseball games in Great Britain, the *Devon and Exeter Gazette* (March 25, 1889) weighed in, saying of one baseball match “If it were not disparaging to the pig, one

might be forgiven for calling this a pig-headed match.” The newspaper asserted that its readers already knew that baseball “was simply ‘rounders’ slightly improved.” It (dismissively) credited Henry Chadwick (carefully identified as the brother of English cricketer Edwin Chadwick) as inventing the game only to amuse himself from the grief of losing his two sons to an epidemic.

After dismissing the invention of baseball, the newspaper then quoted a “society” journal that “The opinion of cricketers is practically unanimous, and ... that, having once seen baseball from curiosity, they have no desire to see it again. It is a dull, stupid game for grown men, good enough for a school playground, but absolutely out of place at Lords [the British cricket Mecca].”

How’s that for severe?

The *Liverpool Daily Post* (March 25, 1889) approached baseball from a different angle. Instead of editorializing, the newspaper conducted a survey of the spectators regarding the baseball game played in Liverpool. The answers proved a bit more nuanced than the opinions of the cricketers the *Gazette* quoted. To the question “What is your opinion of baseball?,” the responses were mostly negative. “Rot” was the favorite one-word expression, that word repeated in scores of answers. Other favorite one-liners were “no good,” “soft,” “childish,” “not as good as rounders,” “rubbish,” “utter nonsense,” “bosh,” “too slow” and the like. One spectator likened baseball to a “funeral.”

More nuanced responses observed that the game made scoring runs too hard, thus making the game appear too slow. Shades of what many say about baseball in 2026!

Although the responses were about 4-1 negative, many saw some merit in baseball. One respondent praised the “clever dodging” of the baserunners, avoiding tags and the like. Others saw the game as “fair,” “good,” “scientific,” and even “enjoyable!”

As to whether baseball would take root in Britain, the consensus was that this “fool of a game,” this “fraud,” was something the American players should “take home” with them. Which (as it turned out) they did.

Potpourri

A Quadruple Play?

We all know how rare a triple play is in baseball. But a “quadruple” play?
From *The National Chronicle*, July 17, 1869:

“In the practice game of the [New York] Mutuals last Tuesday, a remarkably brilliant play was made, as follows—3 men were on bases, when the striker, [Martin] Swandell, struck a bounder to the pitcher, [Charley] Mills, who sent it home, putting out one man. Mills sent it to third, [John V. B.] Hatfield, putting out another. Hatfield quickly sent it to second, Murray, putting out the third man, who as quick sent it to first, [Everett] Mills, putting out the striker, and the fourth man.”

Swandell must not have run very hard to first?

As this was a practice game with no box score printed, it is unclear how the “official scorer” scored this play.

Fixed Batting Orders

While this is the common practice (and rule) today, some clubs in the 1860s went with the same batting order the whole season!

The *New York Clipper*, Sept. 1, 1866, ran an article criticizing the Brooklyn Excelsiors for not keeping a fixed batting order throughout their season:

“.. the Excelsiors, who had out an excellent nine; but some of them were in new positions, and the order of striking was changed. The plan of arrangement by the Unions, of Morrisania, this season, is a model one to copy from, and we refer to it now, as the Excelsior arrangement has been in such striking contrast to it. The Unions fixed the striking order of their nine for the season in June, and they have adhered to it in every game, and each man has retained his position. When any one of the nine was an absentee in a match they replaced him with one from the substitutes, without taking any other player from his regular position. Thus when

[William] Abrams—their second striker and right fielder—was absent, [Wilbur] Hudson would take his place, be the second striker, and go to the right field. The Excelsiors, however, like almost all other clubs this season, except the Stars, when they “haven’t got their nine out,” change about in the regular old-fashioned style. So many clubs have been nipped [stopped?] with this “soft thing” business, that we are surprised to see any club adopt any plan but that of playing in every match, all the way through, as if it was the most important game they had to play.”

What would this reporter think of baseball teams today, who field dozens of different lineups each season? Fixed batting orders, such as the Unions had, would make the game easier to follow for the average fan, but (according to SABRmetrics) would hurt a team’s performance on the field.

Do We Have to Run to 2nd?

Bob Tholkes (in *Base Ball*, Fall 2012) notes that early Philadelphia base ball players often had their bat-ball antecedents in cricket, and seemed to carry some of those cricket-rules habits to baseball:

“A report of a game in Philadelphia published in the *Sunday Mercury* of May 13, 1860, mentioned local players’ tendencies to tag the base with the ball, rather than the baserunner, and to refuse to leave their base when a ground ball was struck if they didn’t think they could reach the next base safely—both contrary to 1860 baseball rules, but making perfect sense in cricket.”

It is true that in Philadelphia, with its numerous cricket clubs, more baseball players had a background playing cricket, than in most other cities. And under cricket rules, a base (wicket) runner is not obliged to run to the next wicket when a ball is hit.

Wagering, 1868-Style

The September 7th, 1868 “championship” game between the Brooklyn Atlantics and the Athletics of Philadelphia, generated unusual interest, with “at least 15,000” spectators jamming the Union Grounds in Brooklyn to view the game. The game (unexpectedly won by the Athletics, 37-13) also generated unusual interest in the wagering community. The *New York Clipper*, Sept. 12, 1868, gives us a glimpse into early baseball betting:

“The result of this game is another illustration of the uncertainties of base ball. Before the announcement of the game and up to the sixth innings, the Atlantics were looked upon as sure winners. The betting was \$100 to \$40, and even at these long odds the Philadelphians were very shy.

Considerable was invested on the game, however, one way and another. In a number of instances \$15 was laid against \$100 that the Athletics would win by the odds of two to one, and these long-headed chaps were winners to a large amount.”

The amounts wagered might not seem like much today, but in the 1860s, it’s clear people were wagering LARGE amounts. In an era where the average wage was about \$400 per year, \$100 would be 25% of that yearly wage, and given inflation, would be equivalent to around \$2550 today. Even \$15 would be more than a full week’s wages.

In addition, the potential betting profits being so large, it’s clear gamblers and ballplayers alike would be tempted to accept bribes to “throw” games. One or two such bets would amply cover the \$300 that gamblers promised Brooklyn Eckfords shortstop Thomas Devyr if he agreed to throw an 1865 game.

Latest Protoball Additions

As of August 14, 2026, the **Protoball Pre-Pro (pre-1871) Database** contained 15,150 clubs and 19,636 ballgames. Since the last newsletter, three months ago, 266 clubs and 1,231 ballgames have been added.

As of today, ALL game reports in the sporting weekly *National Chronicle*, 1869-70, have been entered into the Protoball's Pro-Pro database.

Games Entries. When Protoball started, 12 years ago, the site boasted 1,500 club and game entries, almost all New York entries. Today, that total is over 34,700 entries, covering all 50 states and 200+ countries.

Of the U.S. entries, about 12% of the clubs are located in what is now Metropolitan New York. About 60% of the games entered are Metro NYC games

For the so-called “**predecessor**” **games** such as townball and cricket, there are 1,138 worldwide entries, 134 more than in May. The total includes over 500 US games of cricket, and 200+ games of “town ball.”

The “**Glossary of Games**” includes 339 predecessor and derivative bat-ball games. The “**Chronology**” has 2,142 entries.

335 early U.S. **baseball fields** are described, including baseball fields in all 50 states.

Finds of the Month

In addition to the *National Chronicle* for 1869 and 1870 (the game reports of which have been entered in Pre-Pro), all games reported in local newspapers have been added for the cities of Nashville, Charleston SC, Memphis, and Wheeling WV. All cricket and town ball games prior to the Civil War have been added for Chicago, Philadelphia and Cincinnati. Cincinnati baseball guru **Larry Phillips** can be credited for the latter.

And as part of the runup to the Cleveland SABR Convention, we've added to Protoball every reported baseball game in Cleveland prior to 1871.

Research Requests

ProtoPix: We're slowly adding photos and images of early baseball to the new "ProtoPix" section of Protoball--329 so far. It is hoped to eventually make this a one-stop source of images of early baseball. Submissions would be welcomed. John Thorn deserves thanks for the generous sharing of his image files.

Countries: We're still looking for "first" baseball in 3 small nations: Dominica, Liechtenstein, and Timor-Leste.

Les Quatres: We are looking for details of this game, played in New Orleans, LA around 1860. One contemporary account labels it "a game similar to baseball," and says the game goes back many years prior to 1860, but had only recently revived. Known baseball clubs also played Les Quatres, further suggesting a commonality between the two games.



BULLETIN BOARD

John Thorn's always excellent *Our Game* blog has recently run several GREAT articles on Origins-era baseball. The July 20th issue explores, with the late Craig Waff, early baseball scoring systems. Visit <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/craig-waff-on-early-scoring-systems-f4184c5d81eb>. An essay on the Olympic Club of Philadelphia can be found July 16th, at <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/an-unanticipated-fourth-entry-8cf99c1fa0ab>. John explores the 1837 Constitution of that Olympic Club in

his July 15th posting, <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/constitution-of-the-olympic-ball-club-of-philadelphia-9d20bcb75b92>. The history of that club, from an 1861 article, can be found July 14th at <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/the-olympic-ball-club-of-philadelphia-01f00d2521d8>. Finally, John's brief history of baseball in Philadelphia, written July 13th for the All-Star game, is at <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/base-ball-the-philadelphia-story-f2920f7978ee>.

2027 Fred Conference

All SABR members are invited and encouraged to submit a Research Presentation Proposal Abstract on any topic of 19th-century baseball for the 2027 [Frederick Ivor-Campbell 19th Century Base Ball Conference](#) at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. The 18th annual Ivor-Campbell Conference is scheduled for April 16-17, 2027.

The deadline for proposal Abstracts is **October 31, 2026**. Your abstract must be between 250-500 words for a 20- to 25-minute presentation focused primarily on events taking place prior to 1901. Please include name, title, and contact information and send your proposal as a Microsoft Word or PDF attachment to [Peter Mancuso](#).

This Conference will feature a panel discussion on early town ball and baseball in Philadelphia, moderated by Bill Ryczek, with panelists Matt Albertson, Richard Hershberger and Bruce Allardice.

As usual, a bunch of writings by gurus of early baseball have appeared in various publications.

Tom Gilbert's new book is [Death in the Strike Zone: The Mystery of America's First Baseball Hero](#) (David R. Godine, 2026), which investigates

the life and tragic death of Jim Creighton. Creighton was a 19th-century star pitcher who revolutionized the game with his “modern” pitching. Creighton died in 1862 at age 21.

Bruce Allardice’s new book, *After the Black Sox: The Chicago White Sox in Transition, 1920-1926* (McFarland Publishing), came out July 23rd. The book examines not only the Black Sox Scandal, but the team’s reaction to and recovery from that scandal.

In the spring 2026 issue of SABR’s *Baseball Research Journal*, **Woody Eckard** explores “The ‘Bound Game’ versus the ‘Fly Game’--A Far-reaching Controversy at Organized Baseball’s Beginnings”

In the same issue, **Daniel Torres** looks at early baseball in Rondout, New York: “The Rondout Seniors, the Excelsior Club, and Interracial Baseball in 1867”

The SABR 19th *Century Baseball Committee Newsletter*, “Nineteenth Century Notes” has the following articles in its Summer 2026 edition:

Mark Eberle on “Introducing the Fowler Rules”

Marty Payne on “No-Place Baseball on the Eastern Shore”

Woody Eckard on “The Unlimited In-game Player Substitution Rule of 1891”

Visit <https://sabr.org/research/nineteenth-century-research-committee-newsletters/> for these articles, for notice of the Committee’s Speaker series, and notice of the Nov. 14th Northern New Jersey 19th Century Interdisciplinary Symposium.



From *The American Boys Book of Sports and Games* (1864) (courtesy John Thorn)